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Mind-Body Bridging (MBB) Techniques and Emotional Regulation in Political Discourse and Confidence in Political Talk

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MIND-BODY BRIDGING (MBB) TECHNIQUES AND EMOTIONAL REGULATION IN

POLITICAL DISCOURSE AND CONFIDENCE IN POLITICAL TALK

by

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UTAH STATE UNIVERSITY

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ABSTRACT

Mind-Body Bridging (MBB) Techniques and Emotional Regulation in Political Discourse and

Confidence in Political Talk

by

Joseph Ofori Acheampong, Master of Art

Utah State University, 2024

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There is an increasing division in American national politics, leading to negative outcomes such as heightened distrust, toxic partisanship, and a decrease in constructive political discourse. The study seeks to address the gaps by concentrating on reducing the negative implications of polarization through the utilization of MBB techniques grounded in the I-System Model of Human Behavior. The study aims to investigate the impact of MBB on emotional regulation in political discourse and confidence in political communication. The study employed a paired sample t-test to assess the impact of the intervention on emotional regulation and confidence in political discourse. The findings revealed that while there were marginal increases in emotional regulation scores, control of emotion, confidence in political talks and enjoyment of political dialogue, none of these changes were statistically significant. The study provides valuable insights into the potential of MBB techniques to influence emotional regulation and confidence in political discourse.

(43 pages)

PUBLIC ABSTRACT

Mind-Body Bridging (MBB) Techniques and Emotional Regulation in Political Discourse and

Confidence in Political Talk

Joseph Ofori Acheampong

In today's politically divided landscape, conversations across political lines can often provoke intense feelings of anger and anxiety, making productive dialogue difficult. This polarization not only dampens the quality of public discourse but also affects individual emotional well-being and the broader societal cohesion. This study explores a novel approach to alleviating the negative emotional effects caused by political polarization, using Mind-Body Bridging (MBB) techniques. It specifically targets emotional regulation- how we control and manage our feelings- during political discussions, without attempting to change participants' political beliefs. The study involved participants from Utah State University setting who engaged in MBB training. These participants were then observed for before and after changes in their emotional regulation and confidence during political conversations. The results suggest that while MBB practices helped some individuals manage their emotional responses more effectively, the overall impact on increasing confidence in political discussions was not definitive. The study suggests that more extensive application and a larger participant pool could provide clearer insights into the effectiveness of MBB in political contexts. The study highlights an innovative approach to one of the most pressing issues in contemporary politics- how to maintain healthy, productive political discussions in an era of high emotional stakes and polarization.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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INTRODUCTION

The current state of American national politics is characterized by a growing sense of polarization among party leaders and the general public (Abramowitz, 2010; Abramowitz & Saunders, 2008; Bafumi & Shapiro, 2009; Brady et al., 1995; Fiorina et al., 2008, 2011; Fiorina & Levendusky, 2006; Hunter, 1992; Levendusky, 2009; McCarty et al., 2016; Theriault, 2008). Though counter perspectives exist, such as Fiorina (2005). Abramowitz and Saunders (1998) claim that the ideological realignment was heightened throughout the old generation- Reagan and post-Reagan eras- resulting in a shift in voter partisanship. They contend elite behavior and sociocultural divisions cause political polarization because issues like abortion, gun control, immigration, racism, LGBTQ+ rights, and other issues revolving around traditional moral issues dominate American politics.

The polarization observed in American society has a myriad of negative consequences, as clarified by various literature. This deep-seated political divide has intensified distrust and animosity between individuals with differing political affiliations (Iyengar & Westwood, 2015). It has further contributed to a decline in constructive political discourse and an escalation of toxic partisanship, impeding the ability to reach consensus and make effective policy decisions (Hetherington & Rudolph, 2015). Moreover, polarization has been associated with a surge in the demonization of political opponents, fostering an environment where compromise and cooperation are viewed with suspicion (Mason, 2015). These consequences impede the efficient functioning of democratic institutions and present substantial obstacles to the nation's political stability and social cohesion.

This study takes one distinct research trajectory to fill the existing gaps in this research area. The study focuses on reducing the negative implications of polarization, especially given the

indelible nexus between emotions and the political sphere, including interpersonal and (at times) physical conflict (Kalmoe & Mason, 2022). The study posits that Mind-Body Bridging (MBB) techniques based on the I-System Model of Human Behavior (Block et al., 2020) can alleviate these emotion-specific deleterious effects (feelings of anger and anxiety that stem from polarization) without changing people's beliefs on political issues. This is a novel claim because MBB doesn't attempt to change people's political opinions to solve negative issues associated with polarization. It teaches them how to handle feelings (and sometimes negative behaviors) that could otherwise result from holding views in conflict with the opinions of others around them. Specifically, MBB training and practices can help people transition from a state of "us/them" and affect-laden thinking ("hot cognition") to a more reasoned state of "cold cognition" and "we are in this together" perspective.

The study seeks to address these and interrelated questions on how MBB training influences emotional regulation in political discourse as well as people's levels of confidence and satisfaction when engaging in political conversation. Despite the vast extant literature on partisan animosity and emotional regulation, no research has been conducted on using MBB to help regulate the emotions of individuals in political discourse and foster confidence in political talk. Therefore, the study examines how MBB influences emotional regulation in political discourse and confidence in political talk.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Conceptualization of Emotional Regulation

The regulation of emotions during political discourse has not been extensively studied despite its significance in addressing the growing animosity within the electorate. This research adapts Gross's (1998) definition of emotion regulation, which refers to the strategies individuals employ to control their emotions, including the selection, timing, and manner of experiencing and

expressing them during political discussions or deliberations. This definition is grounded in well-established academic literature, covers various topics, and provides a specific understanding of political discourse, making it highly relevant to the study.

The increasing influence of emotion in political discourse highlights the essential role of emotion regulation in navigating the contentious political landscape. Emotions intensify affective polarization and contribute to growing hostility towards opposing parties, underscoring the need for enhanced emotional regulation to foster more constructive political discussions (Mason, 2015). The contemporary political environment, characterized by intense emotional undercurrents, presents politics as a significant stressor, necessitating adept emotional management strategies (Eveland et al., 2023; Ford & Feinberg, 2020; Henry & Eveland, 2023). Despite the recognized impact of emotions in galvanizing political discourse, the explicit investigation of emotion regulation within this context remains scant. This gap highlights the significance of the MBB technique in improving emotional regulation and confidence in political discourse, thereby contributing to a more civil and productive political environment (Dailey & Palomares, 2004; Eveland et al., 2023; Henry & Eveland, 2023; Noelle-Neumann, 1993; Wolak & Sokhey, 2022).

Affective and Negative Partisanship

The central role of affect in fueling partisan conduct has been underscored by research, indicating a significant shift in affective appraisals within the US electorate over the past two decades. Feelings towards opposing parties have markedly deteriorated, while feelings towards one's party have remained relatively steady (Abramowitz, 2014; Bafumi & Shapiro, 2009; Greenberg, 2005; Huddy et al., 2015; Iyengar et al., 2012; Mason, 2013, 2015; Webster & Abramowitz, 2017). This growing hostility, reflecting changes in the demographic and ideological

composition of political coalitions, has been further exacerbated by the proliferation of partisan media outlets (Iyengar & Hahn, 2009; Levendusky, 2013; Mutz, 2006, 2007; Prior, 2007; Webster & Abramowitz, 2017). The consequences of this affective polarization manifest emotionally, deepening partisan divides and intensifying conflicts, as supporters increasingly view members of the opposing party as not just political adversaries but as fundamentally different or "them" in socio-cultural characteristics and values (Abramowitz, 2013; Frey, 2018; Webster & Abramowitz, 2017). This emotional dynamic between parties contributes significantly to the animosity and dysfunction observed in contemporary political discourse, underscoring the urgent need for strategies to mitigate these intense emotional reactions and foster a more civil political environment.

Negative partisanship, where opposition to the rival party rather than allegiance to one's own drives political behavior, has become a prominent feature of contemporary politics, significantly impacting emotional regulation within political discourse. This phenomenon exacerbates emotional responses and deepens partisan animosity, requiring robust emotional regulation strategies to manage the intense feelings it provokes (Abramowitz & Webster, 2016, 2018; Abramowitz & McCoy, 2019; Iyengar et al., 2012). The need for emotional regulation is critical, as negative partisanship not only fuels divisive attitudes but also influences the emotional climate of political interactions, often leading to heightened stress and reduced capacity for constructive dialogue (Abramowitz & Webster, 2016, 2018; Abramowitz & McCoy, 2019; Henry & Eveland, 2023). Effective emotional regulation can help mitigate these effects by aiding individuals in managing their reactions to politically charged situations, thereby fostering a more respectful and productive political environment (Gross, 2015).

Emotional Regulation and Confidence in Political Discourse

Political discourse plays a crucial role in a strong democratic framework by actively engaging with and respecting opposing viewpoints (Mutz, 2006). Constructive political dialogues thrive not only by acknowledging different perspectives but also by promoting an atmosphere that encourages deliberative political talk and outcomes, such as the development of political tolerance, collective problem-solving, and a sincere comprehension of counterarguments (Choi & Lee, 2021; Moy & Gastil, 2006; Mutz, 2006; Schudson, 1997). To participate in rigorous political debates characterized by opposing viewpoints, individuals must be able to adopt a "we" perspective and be open to different perspectives and actively engage in political talk with those holding opposing opinions (Habermas, 1991; Wojcieszak et al., 2020; Wojcieszak & Mutz, 2009). The Affective Intelligence Theory (AIT) posits that emotional reactions are crucial in determining the cognitive resources devoted to individuals from opposing parties (Marcus et al., 2000; Neblo, 2020). Gerber et al. (2011) indicate that the Big Five personality traits (openness, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism) shape individual political engagement and reaction to political engagement.

Klofstad et al. (2013) revealed that substantial political disagreement within social networks can enhance political engagement, including voting, donating, and attending rallies. Those exposed to higher disagreement levels tended to broaden their discussion networks, actively seeking diverse perspectives, and engaging in more political discussions. Additionally, moderating factors such as political interest and strong partisan attachments amplify the likelihood of political mobilization in response to network disagreement (Klofstad et al., 2013). Mutz (2006) demonstrates how individual traits like political interest and partisan attachment interact within social networks to influence political behavior, such as political participation, mobilization, and

cognitive dissonance. MBB training could influence the Klofstad et al. (2013) findings by enhancing individuals' capacity to manage and respond constructively to political disagreements within their social networks by improving self-awareness and emotional regulation (Block et al., 2020; Utah State University, 2023).

Emotions can have both positive and negative consequences for political engagement and discourse. Positive emotions like enthusiasm, hope, and pride can motivate individuals to engage in proactive behaviors and participate in political discourse (Brader, 2020; Lazarus, 1991; Lyons & Sokhey, 2014; Marcus et al., 2000; Valenzuela & Bachmann, 2015; Wolak & Sokhey, 2022). However, emotions like anger and anxiety can discourage individuals from engaging in frequent political discussions and foster potential social costs detrimental to deliberative democracy and constructive political talk (Averill, 2012; Clark & Taraban, 1991; Eveland et al., 2023; Henry & Eveland, 2023; Valentino et al., 2011; Valenzuela & Bachmann, 2015; Weber, 2013; Wolak & Sokhey, 2022). Consequently, emotional regulation, which involves modifying emotional experiences, expressions, and physiology (Gross, 1998, 2015), is vital for productive political debates and discussions.

MBB training has the potential to enhance emotional regulation in political discourse. MBB involves utilizing mind and body-awareness practices to augment present-moment consciousness, fostering acceptance of emotional states, and influencing brain pathways (Block et al., 2020; Tang et al., 2015). MBB has the potential to decrease emotional reactivity, increase self-awareness, improve cognitive clarity, and foster greater empathy (Block et al., 2020; Ford et al., 2019; Van Bavel & Pereira, 2018). By adopting a constructive perspective when interpreting politically charged information, MBB can promote reduced animosity and increased empathy (Muradova, 2021; Schröder–Abé & Schütz, 2011). Thus, emotional regulation skills learned

through MBB training can diminish the adverse effects of polarization (Abramowitz & Webster, 2016), such as anxiety, anger, and struggles to maintain relationships with people who hold different political opinions (i.e., "Them") (Mason, 2015; Wolak & Sokhey, 2022).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK
MBB Framework and the Identity System Model

The concepts of MBB and the Identity System Model of Human Behavior, from which it is derived, were developed by Dr. Stanley H. Block and his spouse and collaborator Carolyn B. Block (Block, 2007; Block et al., 2020; Block & Block, 2012). MBB operationalizes psychology, neuroscience, and mindfulness principles to promote self-awareness, reduce stress, and improve emotional regulation. The Identity System (I-System) is a mind-body system that aids individuals in forming their identities- who they think they are and how they think they should be. When it is challenged or threatened, it creates mental and physical discomfort, which signals that it is overactive and in distress. When overactive, it negatively affects how one thinks, perceives, and acts. MBB practices are designed to help shift from I-System overactivity to Natural Functioning, which is one's optimal mind-body state of being fully engaged in the moment without the hindrance of the I-System (Block et al., 2020).

Identity System Model and Natural Functioning

The Identity System (I-System for short) forms mental "Requirements" or rules about how the individual, others, and the world should be each moment to maintain a constant sense of identity. When these requirements are violated, such as encountering someone with different political views, the I-System becomes overactive in response to this perceived threat. It views everything dualistically as either consistent or inconsistent with its "Requirements", enabling the "me/you" and "us/them" divides. Natural Functioning refers to one's mind-body state when

engaged fully in the present without the I-System's hindrance. In this state, the "me/you" and "us/them" dualities dissolve- there is only an awareness of the interconnection and interdependence between the self, others, and the broader universe (Block et al., 2020). Natural Functioning is seen as essential for civil, productive political discourse.

MBB Practices and Emotional Regulation

MBB practices include mapping thoughts and physical sensations, recognizing and defusing the I-System's Requirements and threat responses, and cultivating mind and body awareness. These practices target self-referential thoughts and storylines and physical tensions in ways that "rest" the I-System and facilitate emotional self-regulation.

By quieting an overactive I-System, MBB aims to reduce I-System activity that leads to defensiveness, animosity, and difficulty remaining open when faced with differing political views. The practices promote natural functioning, which supports emotional balance, cognitive flexibility, and empathetic presence during disagreements (Block et al., 2020). The application of MBB techniques promotes a shift from dualistic "Us vs. Them" perceptions to a more inclusive "We" perspective, essential for bridging divides in political opinion. This shift is facilitated by enhancing self-awareness and reducing stress responses during political interactions. This allows individuals to engage more openly and empathetically with opposing viewpoints. Such practices not only minimize polarization but also enhance the overall quality of political dialogues, making them more productive and less adversarial (Block et al., 2020; Tollefson & Phillips, 2015).

Aligning MBB with Existing Literature

The MBB framework aligns with various strands of psychological research on emotion regulation, mindfulness, embodiment, resilience, and holistic well-being approaches. In neuroscience, it reflects the increasing understanding of the bidirectional mind-body connection.

MBB is consistent with contemplative traditions emphasizing mind-body unity and transcending dualistic perspectives (Block et al., 2020). MBB's impact extends to fostering positive emotional states like enthusiasm, which is crucial for proactive political engagement. By promoting natural functioning and managing negative thoughts, storylines and emotions, MBB encourages individuals to participate more actively and enjoyably in political processes. This emotional empowerment supports healthier political interactions, where discussions are less about confrontation and more about collective wisdom, problem-solving, and understanding (Brader, 2020; Gerber et al., 2011; Marcus et al., 2000; Wolak & Sokhey, 2022). While receiving limited empirical attention, MBB is a comprehensive mind-body system for self-awareness, identity-based emotional regulation, and restoring adaptive natural functioning (Block et al., 2020).

Hence, the research focuses on two main research questions and hypotheses (namely *Hypothesis 1* and *Hypothesis 2*), which are crucial in achieving broader research goals.

> *Hypothesis 1: Individuals who receive MBB training significantly improve their capacity for emotional regulation when engaging in political discourse with those whose political viewpoints differ substantially from theirs.*
>
> *Hypothesis 2: Individuals who receive MBB training significantly increase their confidence in participating in political discussions with those whose political viewpoints differ substantially from theirs.*

METHODOLOGY AND DATA COLLECTION PROCEDURE

Research Design

The study sought to investigate the impact of MBB training on emotional regulation and confidence in participating in political discussions among Utah State University (USU) students. The study invited Utah State University (USU) students to participate in a research study that included pre- and post-questionnaires. This study aimed to investigate the potential of MBB as a technique for improving emotional regulation skills and boosting confidence in navigating political conversations. It targeted diverse sociodemographic characteristics such as race, gender, and party affiliation, although Utah is a community known to lean to the right on the political continuum. The study incorporated diverse sociodemographic characteristics to enhance the external validity of its findings. This approach aimed to facilitate the generalization of results, provide a comprehensive understanding of emotional regulation across different groups, and reflect the complexity of real-world political settings.

Participants were recruited using a convenience sample of students enrolled in USU 1030/SW 4925 (MBB course) for Spring 2024 and were 18 years old or older. Those who did not register for USU 1030/SW 4925 (MBB Course) during Spring 2024 and students who were younger than 18 were excluded from the study. The students were required to complete a questionnaire at the beginning and end of the course, and as a regular part of the course, they completed a weekly questionnaire about their use of MBB practices.

Participants

The research utilized a convenience sample of 21 students enrolled in an MBB class sponsored by Utah State University (USU) and taught by a certified MBB instructor/clinician, Dr Derrik Tollefson, over seven weeks. These students were invited to participate in the study, and those who chose to enroll and complete the MBB course and questionnaires received financial

incentives of $25. Although the sample was anticipated to consist of students from various sociodemographic backgrounds, using a convenience sampling method resulted in a more homogenous participant group. The study employed pre-tests and post-tests to measure the same group of participants before and after the intervention. The study was approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB #13874).

Procedure

The study was conducted at Utah State University (USU) and investigated the effectiveness of a seven-week MBB course (USU 1030/SW 4925) to enhance emotional regulation and confidence in participants engaging in politically diverse discussions. Participants enrolled in USU 1030/SW 4925 completed the MBB Practices Scale and a Study Questionnaire at the beginning and end of the course to assess changes in emotional regulations. The research employed a design to compare pre- and post-test scores and identify significant improvements associated with the MBB training.

Recruitment was facilitated through a USU-sponsored class, with instructors distributing recruitment emails via the Canvas platform. Efforts were made to maintain the study's objectivity by withholding specific aims and hypotheses from the participants. Data collection utilized structured questionnaires on the Qualtrics platform, and an in-class questionnaire measuring how often students practiced MBB techniques. Participants engaged in weekly MBB sessions to foster self-awareness and emotional regulation, critical for constructive political discourse. The study emphasized confidentiality and ethical standards. Participants were given a $25 Amazon Gift Card as compensation upon completing both surveys.

The intervention consisted of an instructor delivering MBB techniques that mitigate the "Me vs. You" dichotomy and promote natural functioning which is thought to facilitate a neutral

engagement in political discussions. This approach ensured consistency and adherence to the study's objectives, particularly in reducing the negative impacts of political polarization. The study ensured data confidentiality by ensuring data were stored safely using USU's Box storage system.

The MBB course progressively introduced and built upon MBB techniques, ensuring participants developed a foundational understanding before completing the survey. Each session included exercises tailored to promote participants' emotional regulation and self-awareness skills via increased natural functioning. The MBB course introduced the subjects to the basic principles of MBB, including the Identity System (I-System) model and how it affects one's mental and emotional states. The MBB practices aimed at increasing participants' awareness of their mental and emotional patterns, particularly how they react to and manage emotions. Each session included guided MBB practices that allowed participants to experience and apply MBB techniques as homework. Each survey asked for the student's A# (ID #) which the research team used to link the MBB scales collected in class (which had their names on them) with the pre-and post-surveys.

The weekly sessions were structured to build the participants' competence in MBB techniques gradually. This incremental approach helped ensure that participants were not overwhelmed and could integrate each new skill thoroughly before moving on to the next skill and completing the training. Throughout the course, participants were assessed on their understanding and application of the techniques taught. This involves participants indicating how often they have used the MBB Practices presented in their daily lives. After completing the MBB course, participants were expected to fill out the post-survey.

Measuring Outcomes:

 Two main dependent variables were examined in the current study: emotional regulation and confidence in political discourse. The study employed questionnaire items adapted from Wolak and Sokhey (2022) to investigate the influence of emotional regulation and confidence in political discourse. The modification was made to ensure that the questions effectively captured the complex emotional regulation and confidence in political discourse we aimed to study. The emotional regulation variable is a composite index variable created by combining the responses from questions Q7_3 and Q7_5. The Q7_3 (*I sometimes feel overwhelmed or angry when discussing politics with people whose political viewpoints are different than mine*) was a reversed coding from (4= Strongly Agree, 3= Agree, 2= Neutral, 1= Disagree, 0= Strongly Disagree). The Q7_5 (*I can keep my emotions in control when discussing politics with people whose political viewpoints are different than mine*) was measured on a scale from (0= Strongly Agree, 1= Agree, 2= Neutral, 3= Disagree, 4= Strongly Disagree). The study rescaled to an index range of 1 to 10.

 The confidence/enjoyment variable is another index variable formed by combining the responses from questions Q7_1 (*I can keep my emotions in control when discussing politics with people whose political viewpoints are different than mine*) was measured from (0= Strongly Agree, 1= Agree, 2= Neutral, 3= Disagree, 4= Strongly Disagree).and Q7_2 (*I enjoy discussing political topics with people whose political viewpoints differ substantially from mine*). This question was a reversed coding from (4= Strongly Agree, 3= Agree, 2= Neutral, 1= Disagree, 0= Strongly Disagree). The study rescaled to an index range of 1 to 10.

 Overwhelmed is a single-item variable based on the response to question Q7_3 (*I sometimes feel overwhelmed or angry when discussing politics with people whose political*

viewpoints are different than mine). The response scale was from (4= Strongly Agree, 3= Agree, 2= Neutral, 1= Disagree, 0= Strongly Disagree). The control is single-item variable based on the response to question Q7_5 (*I can keep my emotions in control when discussing politics with people whose political viewpoints are different than mine*). The response scale was from (0= Strongly Agree, 1= Agree, 2= Neutral, 3= Disagree, 4= Strongly Disagree).

Table 1

Description of Variables

Variables	Description
Emotional Regulation	This an index of Q7_3 & Q7_5 (scaled "1" to "10)
Confidence/enjoyment	This an index of Q7_1 and Q7_2 & Q13 (scaled "1" to "10)
Overwhelmed	Q7_3 ("Strongly Agree" to "Strongly Disagree")
Control	Q7_5 ("Strongly Agree" to "Strongly Disagree")

Independent Variable

The study explored the effect of MBB practices on emotional regulation and confidence in political discourse. The MBB practice scale consists of Recognize My I-System (body tension & mind clutter), Mapping My I-System, Recognize and Defuse My Requirements, Recognize and Defuse My Depressor, Recognize and Defuse My Fixer and Bridging Awareness. The Recognize My I-System (body tension & mind clutter) scale assesses an individual's ability to recognize and become aware of physical tensions and mental clutter, which can be indicators of underlying stress or emotional states. The Mapping My I-System scale measures an individual's capacity to map or identify the various components of their internal system (I-System), such as thoughts, emotions,

and bodily sensations, and understand their interconnectedness. The Recognize and Defuse My Requirements scale evaluates an individual's ability to recognize and deactivate or defuse their rigid requirements or demands, which over-active the I-System and can contribute to stress and negative emotions. The Recognize and Defuse My Depressor scale assesses an individual's skill in recognizing and disengaging from negative self-talk or depressive thoughts, which can fuel the I-System and exacerbate emotional distress. The Recognize and Defuse My Fixer scale measures an individual's ability to recognize and disengage from the tendency to fix or control situations or others to meet I-System Requirements, which can lead to frustration and dissatisfaction. The Bridging Awareness scale evaluates an individual's capacity to cultivate a state of present-moment awareness and acceptance, bridging the gap between their internal experiences and external reality. MBB practice was measured using a scale ranging from (Never=0, Rarely=1, Occasionally=3, Frequently= 5).

Analytic Plan

Primarily, this study examines the influence of MBB practices on emotional regulation and confidence in political discourse. To achieve this purpose, a paired sampled t-test was employed. The current study conducted a paired sample t-test to compare the measures taken before and after the MBB intervention with the same participants. The paired sample t-test was used to determine if the MBB training led to significant changes from pre- to post-test in emotional regulation and confidence in political discourse.

The null hypothesis: H_0: m $\geq$ 0. The null hypothesis posits that the mean (m) is greater than or equal to zero. The alternative hypothesis, H_A: m < 0, suggests that the mean (m) is less than zero.

Table 2

Paired-Samples T-test results

	Pre-test Average	Post-test Average	P-Value (Difference)
Emotional Regulation	4.38	4.57	0.24
Confidence/enjoyment	5.61	5.47	0.37
Overwhelmed	2.48	2.57	0.28
Control of emotion	3.9	4	0.33
Number of Observations	20		

Note: After cleaning the data of 21 MBB practice scales for pre-test and post-test, the study had 20 respondents due to missing data. The study concluded that the MBB intervention did not significantly affect emotional regulation and confidence within political discourse.

Null Hypothesis:

H_0: MBB techniques do not affect emotional regulation in political discourse (H_0: μ_emotional regulation = 0).

H_0: MBB techniques do not affect confidence in political talk (H_0: μ_confidence/enjoyment = 0).

Alternative Hypothesis:

H_A: MBB techniques improve emotional regulation in political discourse (Ha: μ_emotional regulation > 0).

H_A: MBB techniques increase confidence in political talk (Ha: μ_confidence/enjoyment > 0).

FINDINGS

Table 2 presents the summary statistics for paired sample t-tests, which examined the influence of MBB techniques on emotional regulation and political discourse confidence. The study found a slight increase in the average score for emotional regulation from the pre-test (4.38) to the post-test (4.57). However, the p-value of 0.24 (<0.05 threshold) indicates that this increase is not statistically significant. Thus, the data does not provide sufficient evidence to conclude that MBB techniques significantly impacted emotional regulation. Additionally, the analysis shows a slight decrease in confidence/enjoyment scores from the pre-test (5.61) to the post-test (5.47). The p-value of 0.37 (<0.05 threshold) suggests this decrease is insignificant. Therefore, the MBB techniques did not significantly affect respondents' confidence or enjoyment of political talk.

The findings demonstrate that the average score for feeling overwhelmed increased marginally from the pre-test (2.48) to the post-test (2.57). The difference is also not statistically significant, with a p-value of 0.28 (<0.05 threshold), indicating no significant effect of MBB techniques on the participants' feelings of being overwhelmed when engaging in political discourse. The findings revealed a slight increase in emotion control was observed from the pre-test (3.9) to the post-test (4). The p-value of 0.33 (<0.05 threshold) implies that this is not a statistically significant increase, suggesting no significant impact of the MBB practices on the participants' sense of control. Since all p-values are greater than 0.05, we fail to reject the null hypothesis for each measure. This means there is not enough statistical evidence to conclude that the MBB practices significantly affected emotional regulation, confidence/enjoyment, feeling overwhelmed, or control of emotions in the context of political discourse. The results can perhaps be attributed to the complexities of emotional dynamics in political conversations, measurement sensitivity, and duration of the intervention as well as sample size.

Table 3

Paired-Samples T-test results

	Pre-test Average	Post-test Average	P-Value (Difference)
Emotional Regulation	4.44	4.75	0.17
Confidence/enjoyment	5.44	5.56	0.40
Overwhelmed	2.48	2.69	0.27
Control of emotion	3.9	4.06	0.24
Number of Observations	16		

Note: Following the cleaning of data for 21 MBB practice scales, the study retained 16 respondents due to the exclusion of participants with MBB scores below 20. The study concluded that the MBB intervention did not significantly influence emotional regulation or confidence within the context of political discourse.

The study conducted the paired sample t-test with 20 observations or participants, a relatively small sample size that could impact the statistical test's power. Based on the sample size, it would be unwise to say that MBB practices do not significantly affect emotional regulation and confidence/enjoyment in political discourse. Further research with larger sample sizes or different methodologies might be required to conclusively determine the effectiveness of MBB techniques on emotional regulation and confidence/enjoyment in political discourse.

The study conducted an analysis on the subset of participants who scored 20 or above on the MBB practices scale. This decision was driven by the premise that participants who scored a proficiency level of 20 or above in MBB practices are critical for discerning any potential effects of the intervention. Participants with scores below this threshold were deemed not to have a sufficient foundational practice, potentially diluting the observable impacts of the intervention on emotional regulation and confidence within the political discourse context. By focusing on

participants who scored 20 or above, the analysis aims to isolate the effects of MBB among individuals who have engaged more deeply with the practices, thereby providing a more accurate assessment of its efficacy. This approach ensures that the results reflect the influence of MBB on participants' emotional regulation and confidence in political talk. This enhances the validity of the findings regarding MBB effectiveness in improving emotional regulation and confidence within political settings.

Table 3 presents the summary statistics for paired sample t-tests, which examined the influence of MBB techniques on emotional regulation and political discourse confidence. The study found a slight increase in the average score for emotional regulation from the pre-test (4.44) to the post-test (4.75). However, the p-value of 0.17 (<0.05 threshold) indicates that this increase is not statistically significant. Thus, the data does not provide sufficient evidence to conclude that MBB techniques significantly impacted emotional regulation. Additionally, the analysis shows a slight increase in confidence/enjoyment scores from the pre-test (5.44) to the post-test (5.56). The p-value of 0.40 (<0.05 threshold) suggests this increase is insignificant. Therefore, the MBB techniques did not significantly increase respondents' confidence or enjoyment of political talk for this subgroup.

The findings demonstrate that the average score for feeling overwhelmed increased marginally from the pre-test (2.48) to the post-test (2.69). The difference is also not statistically significant, with a p-value of 0.27 (<0.05 threshold), indicating no significant effect of MBB techniques on the participants' feelings of being overwhelmed. The findings revealed a slight increase in emotion control was observed from the pre-test (3.9) to the post-test (4.06). The p-value of 0.24 (<0.05 threshold) implies that this is not a statistically significant increase, suggesting no significant impact of the MBB practices on the participants' sense of control. Since all p-values

are greater than 0.05, we fail to reject the null hypothesis for each measure. This means there is not enough statistical evidence to conclude that the MBB practices significantly affected emotional regulation, confidence/enjoyment, feeling overwhelmed, or control of emotions in the context of political discourse for this subgroup. The results can be attributed to the complexities of emotional dynamics in political conversations, measurement sensitivity, and duration of the intervention.

A paired sample t-test with 16 observations, which is a rather small sample size, would have low statistical power. Thus, it would be imprudent to assert that MBB practices have no substantial impact on emotional regulation and confidence/enjoyment in political conversation. To definitively establish the effectiveness of MBB approaches on emotional regulation and confidence/enjoyment in political conversation, additional research with larger sample numbers or alternative methodology may be necessary.

DISCUSSION, CONCLUSION, IMPLICATION, AND FUTURE RESEARCH

The current study's exploration into the effects of MBB on emotional regulation and confidence in political discourse presents an opportunity to bridge the gap between the burgeoning field of political psychology and the benefits of MBB. While not statistically significant, the findings prompt a reflection on the existing literature and call for a nuanced understanding of the complexity surrounding emotional dynamics in political conversations. The slight increase in emotional regulation scores suggests a potential for MBB techniques to positively impact individuals' abilities to manage their emotions during political discussions. However, the lack of statistical significance, indicated by a p-value greater than the conventional 0.05 threshold, implies that this increase could be attributed to chance. It is crucial to consider that while the results are not significant, they are not necessarily indicative of the inefficacy of MBB. The subtle

improvements suggest that substantial results could be uncovered with a larger sample size and a more extended intervention duration.

The results did not reach statistical significance despite the slight increase in emotional regulation scores following MBB training. This outcome contrasts with the expectations set by Gross's (1998) theory, which underlines the strategic modulation of emotions. The findings suggest that MBB contributes to a marginal or insignificant effect on emotional regulation during political discourse. However, this contrasts with prior studies by (Block et al., 2020), which have shown the significant impact of MBB techniques on emotional regulation, though not precisely in political contexts. The post-MBB intervention showed increased confidence/enjoyment, although not statistically significant. The extant literature highlighted the role of positive emotions, such as anger and enthusiasm, in fostering enjoyment in political discussions. In line with Wolak and Sokhey (2022), the results of this study suggest that MBB in political contexts may contribute to enhanced enjoyment and confidence in political discourse, although the effects were not statistically significant, potentially due to mediating factors such as a small sample size. Consistent with the literature on the effects of political stressors (Eveland et al., 2023; Ford & Feinberg, 2020; Henry & Eveland, 2023), participants reported a slight increase in feeling overwhelmed and a marginal improvement in their sense of control over emotions. This raises intriguing questions about the role of MBB in managing not just the internal experience of emotions but also the external expressions of these emotions during politically charged discussions.

The literature emphasizes the importance of emotional regulation in maintaining civility and constructiveness in political dialogue– a cornerstone of deliberative democracy. While MBB practices did not significantly alter the emotional regulation or confidence levels in political conversations, the study's insights contribute to the ongoing discourse on cultivating a political

climate that values diverse perspectives, as posited by Habermas (1991), advocating for inclusive political engagement. The increasing affective polarization within the political landscape, underscored by scholars like (Abramowitz & Saunders, 2008; Mason, 2015; Webster & Abramowitz, 2017), suggests a growing need for interventions that can dampen emotional extremities. Although MBB did not produce significant results in this study, it holds potential as a tool for addressing the heightened emotions that characterize current political divisions. This current study opens avenues for future research to investigate further the potential for MBB to aid in emotional regulation and confidence within political discourse. Larger sample sizes with diverse sociodemographics could provide more robust evidence for the significance of MBB on emotional regulation and confidence in political discourse.

One limitation of the study is the relatively small sample size. A sample of this size may not provide enough statistical power to detect a statistically significant effect of the MBB intervention on emotional regulation and confidence in political discourse. The small sample size limits the generalizability of the findings and increases the likelihood that the observed effects could be due to chance rather than a true impact of the intervention. Additionally, the small sample may not adequately represent the diverse experiences and backgrounds of the larger population, which can influence emotional regulation and engagement in political discourse.

Another limitation of the study is the lack of a control group. Future research should aim to employ a more rigorous experimental design capable of better controlling for the influence of other variables on outcomes.

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APPENDIX
Department of Political Science

Utah State University

Thesis Research

I appreciate your participation in this research project. This study investigates the impact of the Mind-Body Bridging (MBB) training and practice on emotional regulation and confidence in individuals engaged in political discussions. Your candid feedback will offer valuable insights for our research.

Need to give the questionnaire a name so you can refer to it in the proposal.

Section A

Sociodemographic Characteristics

    (i)   Age: _____

    (ii)   Gender:

        (a) Male

        (b) Female

        (c) Non-Binary/Other

    (iii)   In politics today, do you usually think of yourself as Republic, Democrat, Independent or something else:

        (a) Republican

        (b) Democrat

        (c) Independent

        (d) Other (specify)

    (iv)   Do you consider yourself a strong Republican/Democrat or not a strong Republican/Democrat?

        (a) Strong

(b) Not strong

(V) Do yourself as leaning closer to the Democrats or leaning closer to the Republicans, or neither?

(a) Lean Republican

(b) Lean Democrat

(c) Neither

(vi) We hear a lot of talk about liberals and conservatives these days. Where would you place yourself on the following scale?

(a) Very liberal

(b) Liberal

(c) Moderate

(d) Conservative

(e) Very conservative

Section B

(1) I like to start political conversations with people whose political views are similar to mine.

- Strongly Agree

- Agree

- Neither agree nor disagree

- Disagree

- Strongly Disagree

(2) Please read each of the following statements and indicate how much you agree or disagree with each statement - I feel confident discussing political topics with people whose political views are different from mine

    (a) Strongly Agree

    (b) Agree

    (c) Neither agree nor disagree

    (d) Disagree

    (e) Strongly Disagree

(3) Please read each of the following statements and indicate how much you agree or disagree with each statement - I enjoy discussing political topics with people whose political viewpoints differ substantially from mine.

  (a) Strongly Agree

  (b) Agree

  (c) Neither agree nor disagree

  (d) Disagree

  (e) Strongly Disagree

(4) Please read each of the following statements and indicate how much you agree or disagree with each statement - I sometimes feel overwhelmed or angry when discussing politics with people whose political viewpoints are different than mine?

    (a) Strongly Agree

    (b) Agree

(c) Neither agree nor disagree

(d) Disagree

(e) Strongly Disagree

(5) Please read each of the following statements and indicate how much you agree or disagree with each statement - I prefer to avoid political discussions with people whose political viewpoints differ substantially from mine

(a) Strongly Agree

(b) Agree

(c) Neither agree nor disagree

(d) Disagree

(e) Strongly Disagree

(6) Please read each of the following statements and indicate how much you agree or disagree with each statement - I can keep my emotions in control when discussing politics with people whose political viewpoints are different than mine

(a) Strongly Agree

(b) Agree

(c) Neither agree nor disagree

(d) Disagree

(e) Strongly Disagree

(7) I like to start political conversations with people whose political views are different than mine.

(a) Strongly Agree

(b) Agree

(c) Neither agree nor disagree

(d) Disagree

(e) Strongly Disagree

<div align="center">Mind-Body Bridging Practices Scale</div>

<div align="center">Date: _____</div>

Over the past week, indicate how often you have used the *Mind-Body Bridging Practices* presented thus far in your daily life.

Frequency of MBB Practice	Never	Hardly Ever	Occasionally	Regularly
Recognize My I-System (body tension & mind clutter)				
Mapping My I-System				
Recognize and Defuse My Requirements				
Recognize and Defuse My Depressor				

Recognize and Defuse My Fixer				
Bridging Awareness				